

New Mexico Legislature Indian Affairs Committee
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Introduction

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On behalf of the Navajo Board of Election Supervisors (NBOES), the Navajo Election Administration (NEA) would like to introduce the Navajo Nation Election program and how it correlates with the three States of New Mexico, Arizona and Utah. The Navajo Election Administration is a tribal program within the Legislative Branch of The Navajo Nation. The NEA primarily governs tribal elections; additionally it also has a duty to safeguard the voting rights of the Navajo people in “outside” elections as well. For this reason, the NEA has been working with the counties, state and federal government regarding election related matters that affect the Navajo people primarily ensuring that the Native American voters are fully aware of election related information in their respective Native language(s). This includes recommending, assisting, providing and seeking support for significant matters of importance to the Navajo Nation and other Native American Tribes. A big part of our initiative within in the county and state government is to make sure the Native Americans residing in these areas are provided with necessary assistance and services to all matters relating to elections. In order to make this happen, separate entities need to work together to promote the program and its initiatives. The NEA has designated an individual and resources to work with county, state, national and federal issues. This individual works with eleven counties in three states and federal agencies as well as other entities. In order to continue fighting for the rights of the Native Americans at all levels of government, the NEA seeks support from the Legislative Members within all levels of governments.

New Mexico Secretary of State - Native American Election Information Program

a. History

The *Native American Election Information Program* (NAEIP) is a part of the New Mexico Secretary of State Office (SOS). It was created in the 1980’s through a consent decree at

the state level. There are minority language assistance programs at the County level throughout the Navajo Nation in Arizona and Utah. New Mexico is the only state that has the *Native American Election Information Program* at the state level. This program has served the Native American tribes in the State with election related matters such as translations of election information, trainings, interpretations, etc. It has visibly made a difference in the Native American voter turnout for county, states and federal elections. The State of New Mexico has more Native Americans registered to vote as well as more Native Americans that are elected into county and state offices. The Program strives to continue to get more Native Americans to register and vote and to get more Native Americans into elected positions. The program has been present through several administrations of the Secretary of State. The NEA has worked with each SOS to improve the program and progress in a forward manner. Major strides have been made since the inception of the NAEIP program in New Mexico.

b. Current Status

A State level Voting Rights Coordinators (VRC) is currently positioned at the McKinley County Office in Gallup, New Mexico. This has been her worksite since August, 2010. Previously her worksite was located in Crownpoint, NM at the Navajo Election Administration Eastern Agency Office. The building was declared unsafe and the staff had to move. The VRC oversees all the Navajo chapters and communities in the New Mexico region of the Navajo Nation. This region includes the satellite chapters of Ramah, Alamo and Tohajiilee Chapters. There are seven counties located in the Navajo Nation in the State of New Mexico and VRC works with these counties on a daily and weekly basis. The VRC working from the Gallup location is convenient and cost efficient for the NAEIP Program.

c. Concern

The Navajo Election Administration was informed that the Voting Rights Coordinator will be permanently relocated to the State Office in Santa Fe starting in July, 2011. The understanding is that this will be done as a cost saving measure to the state, but in actuality it will increase spending more funds to accommodate the duties of the position from a distant location. In order for the Navajo VRC to perform her duties efficiently, her work station must remain in the immediate proximity of the Navajo Nation. As stated before, the NEA works closely with this position and often times administer services in the Eastern Navajo region. Such services as visits to the county and tribal offices, trainings, work sessions, meetings, voter registration drives, public events, etc. are coordinated and conducted locally. Facilities and accommodations are readily available to the VRC through the County Administration and through local chapters located

throughout the region. The concern of the NEA is if the workstation is relocated to Santa Fe, services to the Navajo voters throughout New Mexico will be interrupted and will be limited when and if the VRC is able to come out from the Santa Fe office.

d. Recommendations

The Navajo Election Administration is recommending that the Voting Rights Coordinator remain in McKinley County office in Gallup where she is closer to the people she was hired to assist. The NEA is there to assist the VRC locally and the office space is provided at no charge to the State.

With this justification, the Navajo Election Administration is seeking support from the *New Mexico State Legislature Indian Affairs Committee* to keep the Native American Election Information Program Navajo Voting Rights Coordinator within the Navajo Nation boundaries in Gallup, New Mexico.